

# Communists In Latvia Split Ranks

## 300,000 Lithuanians Stage Defiance Rally

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MOSCOW, April 7—The Latvian Communist Party split into two rival factions tonight over the crucial issue of whether to follow the example of other Baltic republics and declare independence from Moscow.

Most of the ethnic Latvian delegates walked out of a party congress after the Russian-dominated majority sought to postpone debate on a new political program. They later announced that they would set up their own independent party which is likely to support moves to restore Latvia's prewar independence.

Today's developments are further evidence that the secessionist movement that began in Lithuania is gathering strength in the other Baltic republics of Latvia and Estonia. It coincided with a massive pro-independence demonstration in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, to express support for the Lithuanian government's month-long defiance of Moscow.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis told a cheering crowd, estimated at about 300,000 people, that Lithuania would not rescind its March 11 declaration of independence, despite intense pressure from the Kremlin. "Iron will melt to wax, and water will turn to stone, before we will retreat," he said, repeating the battle cry of Lithuania's 14th-century national hero, Duke Gediminas.



Lithuanian woman wearing traditional hat attends rally yesterday in Vilnius.

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The Communist parties in Lithuania and Estonia have already thrown in their lot with the pro-independence popular front movements there, leaving only a relatively small group of Communists loyal to Moscow. The fact that the nationalists have turned out to be in a minority in the Latvian Communist Party is largely a reflection of the ethnic balance in the most industrialized of the three Baltic republics.

Heavy Russian migration over the past four decades has left ethnic Latvians accounting for barely 52 percent of Latvia's 2.7 million population. Less than 30 percent of the membership of the Latvian Communist Party is drawn from the indigenous population.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev summoned leaders of the Latvian party to Moscow this week in an attempt to head off today's split. But Latvian activists interviewed by telephone from Riga, the capital, said the split had become inevitable because of growing political differences between the Russian majority and the Latvian minority.

"The situation is very complicated here," said Marcus Wolfsson, a Latvian deputy in the Soviet legislature in Moscow. "We now have a leading party which is in effect a Russian Communist Party. We also have an independent Latvian Communist Party."

The pro-independence faction consists of 242 of the 700 delegates to the congress who held their inaugural meeting in another part of the building. It appears to have the backing of most of the best-known Lat-

vian Communists, including Anatoly Gorbunov, the republic's president.

It remains to be seen whether the pro-Moscow majority of the Latvian Communist Party will be able to slow down the secessionist bandwagon in Latvia. A significant number of Russian residents of Latvia appear to have voted for the Latvian Popular Front, whose political program includes the restoration of Latvia's independence from the Soviet Union, in last month's elections.

The Popular Front is likely to win two-thirds of the seats in the new Latvian parliament which is due to hold its inaugural session May 3, giving it the right to change the constitution. But Wolfsson and others predicted that it will probably stop short of an immediate declaration of independence, as in Lithuania, opting instead for a more gradual process, as in Estonia.

In an attempt to force the Lithuanians to back down, Gorbachev has used his new presidential powers to demonstrate that the new government in Vilnius does not control its own territory. Last week, he warned Estonian leaders that he may take similar action against them if they flout the Soviet constitution.

As today's pro-independence demonstration got underway in Vilnius, a Soviet military helicopter flew over the city, dropping Russian-language leaflets denouncing the independence declaration. Witnesses said some demonstrators shook their fists at the helicopter and shouted in derision.

"Stay calm, they have been littering the country for 70 years. Litter always ends up on the trash heap," Landsbergis, who was elected Lithuanian president last month, told the crowd.

[In New York, Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov told Cable News Network that Lithuania could become independent in "not more than five" years under a new law passed this week by the Supreme Soviet legislature.

[The law, which would require a referendum within a republic seeking to secede, plus a cooling-off pe-

riod of five years, has not yet cleared the Congress of People's Deputies. "We must follow certain procedures," Gerasimov said, "just as when you have a divorce you have conflicting claims and you follow certain procedures to settle all these things."]

Nationalist pressures are also growing in the western Ukraine, where radicals took control of many city councils in last month's elections. In Lvov, the local council voted overwhelmingly this week to force the Russian Orthodox Church to hand back the city's cathedral to Ukrainian Catholics in time for Easter.